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GREEK SHOOTING
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ATHENS, GREECE

November 17, a leftist terror group which has boasted of killing two U.S. officials here, has claimed it killed a conservative Greek newspaper publisher in what it said was a campaign to "strike down CIA agents."

A U.S. Embassy spokesman dismissed as "nonsense" claims that the slain publisher, Nicholas Momferratos, had been involved with the CIA.

In Washington, CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said, "We wouldn't have any comment on something like that. It really doesn't serve any purpose."

Momferratos, 60, chairman of the board at Apogevmatini (Afternoon) newspaper, died Thursday evening, moments after two gunmen fired a dozen bullets through a side window of his blue Mercedes limousine, striking his back and chest, Athens police said. The attack occurred in the city's fashionable Kolonaki district.

Momferratos' driver, Pangiotis Rousetis, was in "critical but stable condition" today after surgery to remove bullets from his arm and stomach, a spokesman for the Red Cross hospital in the Greek capital said.

Police sources who spoke on condition of anonymity said ballistic tests indicated a .45-caliber gun fired in Thursday's attack was the same weapon used in previous killings claimed by November 17. The other weapon was a .22-caliber gun, police said.

In a rambling, four-page typewritten leaflet found near the attack site, November 17 claimed it carried out the Momferratos killing and said: "We shall uncover and strike down CIA agents in the press."

The statement claimed Momferratos "became owner of Apogevmatini with CIA money."

A U.S. Embassy spokesman, who spoke on condition he not be identified, today said, "The charges are nonsense. We deplore the killing."

Apogevmatini, a popular Athens afternoon paper, opposes Premier Andreas Papandreou's Socialist government and supports conservative President Constantine Caramanlis, the country's head of state and a personal friend of Momferratos.

Papandreou, who condemned Momferratos' killing, met today with Caramanlis and discussed terrorism. An official statement issued afterward said the two Greek leaders "ascertained the need to intensify and organize more suitable measures to neutralize this threat."

After Momferratos was shot, three attackers drove away in a white Fiat with stolen license plates, police said. The car was later found abandoned 150 yards from the scene of the shooting, a city police spokesman said.

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The limousine smashed through the window of a luxury store selling chocolates and porcelain.

Witnesses described one of the attackers as swarthy and of medium height, and another as bearded.

The November 17 group is named after the date on which police and troops crushed a 1973 rebellion against Greece's military dictatorship by students at Athens Polytechnic University.

At that time, Momferratos was serving as industry minister in a civilian Cabinet appointed by dictator George Papadopoulos to prepare the country for elections.

Thursday's attack was the first shooting claimed by the extremist group since April 1984, when it boasted of a failed attack against U.S. Army Sgt. Robert Judd as he was driving to the U.S. Air Force base at Athens airport.

November 17 claimed responsibility for the shooting of U.S. Navy Capt. George Tsantes, an attache at the American Embassy, in November 1983. It claimed the killing of Richard Welch, CIA station chief in Athens, who was gunned down at Christmas 1975, and three Greek police officers.

In March 1983, George Athanassiadis, publisher of the Athens daily Vrachyni (Evening) was killed in his office by a gunman. A group calling itself the Anti-Military Struggle claimed the killing.

The assassination came as the Greek Parliament prepared to vote for a new president next month and is getting ready for a general election later this year.

Momferratos, an economist and president of the Greek newspaper publisher's union, served briefly as a Cabinet minister in a civilian government during the 1967-1974 military dictatorship in Greece.